

QUALITY STANDARDS

# Gender-Affirming Care

A guide for gender-  
diverse adults

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Ontario Health is committed to improving the quality of health care in the province in partnership with patients, clinicians, and other organizations.

To do that, Ontario Health develops quality standards. These are documents that outline what high-quality care looks like for conditions or processes where there are large differences in how care is delivered, or where there are gaps between the care provided in Ontario and the care patients should receive. These quality standards set out important steps to improve care. They are based on current evidence and input from an expert committee that includes patients, care partners, clinicians, and researchers.

This patient guide accompanies the quality standard on [gender-affirming care](#). It outlines the top 5 areas where clinicians can take steps to improve gender-affirming care for gender-diverse adults. The patient guide also includes suggestions on what to discuss with your clinicians, as well as links to helpful resources.

#### Terms we use in this guide

In this guide, we use the term **gender-diverse** to refer to all people whose gender identity or expression differs from the gender attributed to the sex assigned to them at birth. The term is inclusive of all Two-Spirit, trans, and nonbinary people.

**Clinicians** are health care professionals who provide care to patients, including doctors, nurses, nurse practitioners, pharmacists, psychologists, registered dietitians, and social workers.

**Primary care clinicians** are also known as primary care physicians, family doctors, and nurse practitioners.

Everybody is different, and some options may not apply in your situation. If you have questions about your care, **it is important to speak with your clinician.**

# Summary of the top 5 areas to improve gender-affirming care



## Quality Statement 1: Gender-Affirming Education and Training for Health Care Teams

### What the standard says

Gender-diverse adults receive care from clinicians who have the clinical and cultural competency and cultural humility to provide safe and appropriate gender-affirming care. Health care organizations provide ongoing gender-affirming education and training for health care teams to build organizational capacity to deliver equitable care.

### What this means for you

Your clinicians should always treat you with respect and dignity, and they should always listen to you. They should help you feel safe and care for you in a way that respects you and your gender identity. For example, they should ask for and use your correct name and pronouns. Your clinicians should work with you to understand your needs and any difficulties you face in accessing care.

Your primary care clinician should have the education and training to provide both primary care and gender-affirming care services, such as gender-affirming hormone therapy.

They should refer you to specialized care if appropriate.

### Did you know?

About 1 in 300 people in Ontario identify as gender diverse.



## Quality Statement 2: Gender-Affirming Primary Care

### What the standard says

Gender-diverse adults receive appropriate and compassionate gender-affirming primary care health assessments, screening, treatment, and follow-up. This care is based on their needs and preferences and is appropriate for their age, gender, and current anatomy.

### What this means for you

- Your primary care clinician should provide you with safe, respectful, and compassionate care.
- They should respect your gender identity and ask for and use your correct name and pronouns.
- Your primary care clinician should help you with your physical health care needs, your mental health care needs, and health care needs related to your gender identity. For example, primary care clinicians can prescribe gender-affirming hormone therapy, and they can refer you to other primary care clinicians or specialists for gender-affirming surgical assessment.
- Your primary care clinician should keep up-to-date records of your gender-affirming care (for example, past and present use of hormone therapy and any gender-affirming surgeries you may have had).
- If you have plans to start or continue gender-affirming care, such as hormone therapy or surgery, your primary care clinician should support you in that process.

### What is trans broken arm syndrome?

“Trans broken arm syndrome” occurs when a clinician incorrectly assumes that a medical condition is related to a person’s gender identity or transition status or when a clinician asks invasive, unnecessary questions about a person’s gender. An example is a clinician assuming that a person’s severe asthma attack is related to their use of gender-affirming hormone therapy before doing any health assessments or tests for asthma. Trans broken arm syndrome may be fairly common; a research study found that nearly one-third of gender-diverse participants had experienced it.

Your primary care clinician should not refuse to provide you care based on your gender identity. And they should not ask questions about your gender that are not relevant to the care you need.



## Quality Statement 3: Gender-Affirming Hormone Therapy

### What the standard says

Gender-diverse adults have access to gender-affirming hormone therapy from a primary care clinician. Gender-affirming hormone therapy meets the needs and preferences of gender-diverse adults.

### What this means for you

You should have access to gender-affirming hormone therapy from a primary care clinician. They should assess your health and work with you to decide which option is best for you. If you are interested in gender-affirming hormone therapy, your primary care clinician should discuss the following with you:

- Your gender-affirming goals and expectations
- Your physical health, your mental health, and any medications you are taking
- The process of starting gender-affirming hormone therapy
- The different types of hormone therapy available to you and how to take them; typical options are injections, gels, pills, and patches
- The potential benefits, risks, limitations, and side effects of the types of hormone therapy available to you
- When you can expect to start seeing effects
- What physical changes to expect
- What mood changes you might experience
- Any support you may need
- What is covered by the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) and what you might have to pay for out of pocket
- What follow-up to expect (for example, clinic visits to monitor physical changes and side effects, blood work to monitor hormone levels, and clinic visits to make changes to your dosage if needed)

#### Did you know?

The pace of your transition is up to you. There is no “best” time frame or age for a person to transition. The decision is up to you.



## Quality Statement 4: Gender-Affirming Mental Health Care

### What the standard says

Gender-diverse adults are offered trauma-informed, person-centred, gender-affirming care for mental health and substance use concerns as needed. These concerns are considered concurrently with gender incongruence and gender diversity as needed. Care for all aspects of health and well-being is delivered as part of a comprehensive care plan.

### What this means for you

Your clinician should provide you with the care you need in a respectful, compassionate way if you have a mental health or substance use concern. If your clinician is unable to provide you with this care, they should connect you with another clinician who can.

Receiving care for a mental health or substance use concern should not prevent you from starting or continuing to receive gender-affirming care. Your clinician should involve you in all decisions about your care.

#### What is trauma-informed care?

Trauma-informed care is health care provided by clinicians who have an understanding of trauma and the impact that traumatic experiences can have on people. When clinicians provide care in a trauma-informed way, they do not necessarily address the trauma directly. Rather, they understand that past traumatic experiences can contribute to people's current health concerns. A trauma-informed approach to health care is based on understanding, compassion, and respect.

#### Did you know?

Your clinician should not assume that a mental health or substance use concern is related to your gender identity or transition status. And they should not ask you invasive, unnecessary questions about your gender.



# Quality Statement 5: Gender-Affirming Health Care Environments

## What the standard says

Gender-diverse adults receive care in a safe, trauma-informed, gender-affirming, and culturally responsive environment. Person-centred care is provided throughout their care journeys.

## What this means for you

You should receive care in an environment that feels safe and welcoming. This includes things like:

- Posters or signs that let people know a clinician's office is welcoming to gender-diverse people
- Allowing you to use the available washroom of your choice
- Forms that allow you to describe your gender how you want to

All clinicians and administrative staff should treat you with respect and dignity, and they should always listen to you. They should also ask for and use your correct name and pronouns.

### Share with your health care team

Let your health care team know if, for safety and privacy, you prefer one name to be called in the waiting room and a different name to be used when you're speaking privately with your clinician.

# Suggestions on what to discuss with your clinicians

## Ask your clinicians:

- What types of health assessment and treatment will I need to achieve my gender identity goals?
- How long will it take to achieve my gender identity goals?
- What side effects might I have with gender-affirming hormone therapy?
- Since there are different types of gender-affirming hormone therapy (injectables, gels, pills, and patches), how will we choose which is best for me?
- Is my care covered under the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP)?
- Will I have to pay out-of-pocket for any care?
- If I have trouble paying for some care, are there options to help cover the fees?
- How do I take my hormone therapy?
- Will I be taking hormone therapy for the rest of my life?
- Who should I contact if I need help or have questions about my care?

## Share with your clinicians:

- Your correct name(s) and pronouns
- Your goals for gender-affirming care
- Any gender-affirming treatments or surgeries you have already had
- What supports you might need, such as time off work or school or connections to peer groups
- Any current or future plans to have children
- Anything about your care that you do not understand
- Any other health concerns you have
- The names of any other clinicians involved in your care
- Any side effects you experience from hormone therapy
- Any mental health concerns you might have, for example, if you are feeling depressed or anxious



# If you are a care partner

If you care for a gender-diverse person, you might have your own questions. It can help to identify yourself as the person’s care partner (also called a “caregiver”) to their health care team. This will help ensure they know and respect your questions and concerns.

- Let them know what your role will be in helping the person manage their care.
- Let them know if you need help.

## Learn more

[Rainbow Health Ontario](#) is an organization that creates opportunities for the health care system to better serve gender-diverse people. It also provides many resources and information for gender-diverse adults in Ontario, including the following:

- A [service provider directory](#) to help people find health and social service providers in Ontario who are committed to providing competent and welcoming care for gender-diverse people
- A [trans health knowledge base](#) that provides answers to questions commonly asked by gender-diverse people to help them with the process of transitioning both socially and medically, including information on accessing health care for [Indigenous people](#), [newcomers and refugees](#), [international students](#), and [international visitors with a work visa](#)
- Information on mental health, including:
  - [How having a mental health diagnosis other than gender dysphoria can affect people’s care](#)
  - [How to find the right counsellor](#)
  - [Where to get free counselling](#)
- Answers to frequently asked questions about [gender-affirming hormone therapy](#) and an [infographic on injecting hormones that includes information about where to find supplies for safe injection](#)
- Answers to frequently asked questions about [gender-affirming surgeries](#)
- A fact sheet on [reproductive options for trans people](#)

[Trans Care BC](#) is an organization that provides resources to help people connect to gender-affirming health and wellness supports, including the following:

- [How to inject hormones](#)
- [Steps for safer intramuscular hormone injections](#)
- [Steps for safer subcutaneous hormone injections](#)

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario provides [information about human rights in the provision of health services](#)

# Need more information?

If you have any questions or feedback about this guide, please contact us at [QualityStandards@OntarioHealth.ca](mailto:QualityStandards@OntarioHealth.ca) or 1-877-280-8538 (TTY: 1-800-855-0511).

Need this information in an accessible format? 1-877-280-8538, TTY 1-800-855-0511, [info@OntarioHealth.ca](mailto:info@OntarioHealth.ca)

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